

## **Effective Communication Skills: Sending Your Message**

*"I know you think you understand what I said. But I don't think you understand that what I said is not what I meant."*

Effective communication is key to getting our messages across to others both at work and in our personal relationships. It maximizes the impact of our message while minimizing misunderstanding and defensiveness.

1. **Clearly own your messages by using "I" statements, such as "I feel..."**. Personal ownership includes taking responsibility for the ideas and feelings that you express. People disown messages when they use phrases such as "most people..." or "you know...", which can lead others to become defensive when they think you are talking for them.
2. **Make your messages complete and specific**. Include all information the other person needs to understand you, such as assumptions you are making, intentions for telling them, etc. For example, don't just say, "I want you to change", be specific about what you mean by change, in what ways.
3. **Ensure your body language matches what you are saying**. Face the person; maintain eye contact, pay attention to the tone and level of your voice. People respond to our non-verbal communication more than our verbal because non-verbal messages are stronger and more accurate of our feelings. We can hear what we say, but not always see what we do.
4. **Ask for feedback concerning the way others are perceive your messages**. Ask them what they heard you say and what meaning they attached to it.
5. **Right time and right place**. Find a time and place that works well for both people involved. When someone is rushing out the door to catch a bus or when they are getting ready for bed after a long busy day may not be the best times to have a conversation. Discussing private issues in the busy lunchroom or in the elevator may not be the best choice of locations.
6. **Think before you speak**. Decide what you want to say before you speak. Think it through. How might the other person respond? What is your intention? Is it really what you meant to say?
7. **Ensure you have the other person's attention**. Wait until they are off the phone or until the TV is turned off. Ensuring you have eye contact helps you to know that they are paying attention to you.